

conspiracy theories were as rife and outrageous as in the decades to come." (126).

"However murky Oswald's politics, Cuba was his singular mission." (127) [how easy people can be fooled by 1,000 leaflets... ed.]

"Bobby's strong grip left an imprint on the administration's Cuba policy as surely as Oswald's fingerprints appeared on the murder weapon." (127) [OH?]

"And if the baiting of Castro incited Oswald to retaliate, did Bobby Kennedy not share the blame?" (129)

"Johnson was in fact full of such (conspiracy) theories." (131)

"In fact, Johnson knew little of [Bobby] Baker's business affairs." (147) [and LBJ had troubling remembering Lady Bird's name.... ed.]

"In his war with RFK, Johnson had a powerful ally: J. Edgar Hoover." (187)

"If [Johnson] could have figured out a way not to run for president in 1964 without giving the nomination to Bob Kennedy...he would not have run." (218)

"Robert Kennedy had been a United States senator for four weeks when the bombs began to rain upon North Vietnam." (251)

"On the second anniversary of the assassination--after Medicare, Medicaid, voting rights, and all the rest--two-thirds of Americans still considered John Kennedy a "better president" than Lyndon Johnson." (310)

"Bobby Kennedy played parlor games with artists and poets; when Johnson visited a museum he looked uncomfortable, like a misplaced exhibit." (313)

"Drowned out by screams of "Bobby!" his speeches were an inaudible as Beatles concerts." (345)

"If a 15-year-old kid is given a choice between Rap Brown and RFK, he *might* choose the way of sanity...Give that

same kid a choice between Rap Brown and LBJ, and he'll probably reach for his revolver." (415)

"The president, meanwhile, had drinks with Senators Everett Dirksen and Mike Mansfield and urged them not to launch congressional investigations into the shooting [of RFK]...and it was not as if the Warren Commission had really resolved anything." (455)



INTERVIEW: Dallas Police Officer

---reported by Walt Brown

I have been fortunate to have been in contact with a retired Dallas Police officer who now lives in the north-central United States, but has been back to Dallas on the anniversary of the assassination.

What he has told me over the years has always been, essentially, off the record. Recently, I asked his permission to print what he has told me (on varying occasions--this was not one "interview.") He was not comfortable with the concept, but acquiesced, on the grounds of anonymity. Speaking purely editorially, I can only add that his insights are remarkable, and on the one occasion we planned to meet in Dallas, he gave me a tour of "the Big D" unlike any other I have ever had. He still knows folks there, and his memory for detail is beyond kaleidoscopic. He is also very well read in assassination literature, both pro and

con.

Walt: Were you on duty on November 22, 1963, and if so, what were your specific duties that day?

DPD: I was working out of the Criminal Intelligence Division (CID) that day, and was assigned to do surveillance on a militant group about which some concern had been expressed. (He paused). I know what you are thinking. I've read the books that say the DPD really wasn't watching anybody that day, but I know I was, and I know what the confusion stems from. Clearly, nobody was doing surveillance on people seen as potential assassins. If that had been the concern, they would have been in custody for the duration of the President's visit. But there were concerns, not unlike the group that had provided an ugly encounter with [Adlai] Stevenson in the month previous. So we were out, in force, keeping our eyes open.

W: Tell me what happened then. I've always wanted to ask that question in an interview, as it's one the Warren Commission never asked.

D: Well, naturally, the police radio was monitoring the motorcade very carefully, and it would have been foolish if not derelict if I had not been aware of what was going on. Suddenly--and it occurs to me that there is no other way to describe it--, while I was at the site I was assigned to, came the news that there had been shots fired, down in the vicinity of Houston, Elm, the triple underpass--I'd have to go to the logs to check the exact transmission, but I heard the important part, that the shots had been fired, and I got that car moving-fast. I would estimate I was at the Book Depository in no more than three minutes. [ed. note: we "ran the route" and it was only three minutes in normal traffic] I pulled in to the 'real' Elm

Street, the road that was the straight extension of the Elm Street that ran east-west. I passed the Depository Building, and parked by that extension of it where you see the ornate brick work with the "tramps" in some of the "tramp" photos. There was already a police car at each curb, and one in the middle of the street, further on, so when I parked, it effectively meant that no one would or could drive a vehicle out that way. The crime scene itself--well, all I knew was that I was in the crime scene--the plaza. A command post was being set up in front of the Depository. People were everywhere--the curious, those who were looking for something, and maybe not sure what, and there were others who looked stricken by what had happened. I only wished I had somehow been at the crime scene when the shots happened, so I could add my own perceptions to the many others that are out there.

W: I respect that. Did anything happen in your time there that would give you concerns about the official version of events?

D: Hell, yes. I was there, I'm going to say a couple hours. It's just as impossible for me to say *exactly* how long I was there as it is for people to say the shots took, say, 6.3 seconds. You know what I mean.

W: Sure.

D. But in the first few minutes, a pair of things happened. The first was that the search was narrowed to the Depository Building. And since I had not been there to act on my own perceptions, it seemed reasonable to think that what was happening was based on the existing perceptions. But--but in the first, I'd say twenty minutes, either three or four, and I'll never be able say which of those numbers is accurate, but either three or four individuals or couples came to me,--I

was a cop after all--and told me that they had information about the shooting, and indicated the shots came from the area of the pergola. And they were clear about what they were saying. I'm standing there, in Elm Street "Extension," and people are clearly pointing away from the big orange building on the corner. Clearly. So I told each person or couple to please give that information to the officers at the command post, and pointed over to where it was, by the front of the Depository.

W: Did it strike you at that moment that they were serious in what they were telling you, or they were guessing, or even just reaching out for their fifteen minutes of fame?

D: They meant *precisely* what they told me. That was the immediate reason that made me think there was more to this murder--although I might not have known it was a murder when I heard the first report--and that, plus my CID background, would allow me to say that I've been investigating the JFK murder for well over 38 years. [He paused] I know--it wasn't that long ago. but things seemed to be happening, just a sense of underground intimations that very powerful people were not as thrilled with John Kennedy as many people in the street were.

W: Could you give me an example of what you are saying? Something more than just a gut hunch?

D: The biggest hint was Lyndon Johnson. That man was literally up to his ass in alligators in the last year of JFK's presidency. But there was always the very clear sense--sense--that powerful events were in motion that would save him. So let me ask you--*what could save Johnson?*

W: Well, certainly becoming president couldn't hurt, and if he could put together

some good old boys to keep the lid on the Dallas investigation....

D: And he did. You know that. I know that. But it was over before the Warren Commission was announced. [Homicide chief Will] was told, when Oswald died, to shut down the investigation--Oswald had done it, and he was dead.

W: Let me interrupt. Are you saying, or inferring that there was more investigating to do?

D: I'm *saying* it. We knew it. Maybe not all DPD had an obsession to get to the bottom of all of, but it wasn't long before we were swamped with Feds--Feebs--literally trying to keep the genie in the bottle, and a number of us, in the DPD, felt that we were being set up. As I said, Fritz was devastated. I read in someone's memoirs (thinks a minute, and I didn't prompt), that Fritz had a discussion, one day, a few years later, about his frustrations about that case. Well, if he DID have that conversation, it was the only one he had, because the one thing he would not discuss, except with his wife, was the JFK case. It bothered him, and scarred him. But, let me add quickly--the scars on Fritz were nothing compared to what [chief Jesse] Curry went through. Fritz had the image of being very good at what he did--and he was, believe me. But he ran the Homicide Bureau as a separate entity, and wanted the men to be "like him" and to feel that their orders came only from him. He also wanted his detectives to be Will Fritz, in miniature just as [Sheriff J. "Bill"] Decker wanted his deputies to be his clones, literally. And, of course, Fritz interrogated Oswald, and that simple act was enough to get him positive notoriety amidst tragedy. But Jess Curry--there's another story. He was chief, but powerless in Fritz's domain. Do you know that he never asked Oswald even one

question?

W: I am aware of that.

D: Okay. But what does it tell you?

W: It certainly confirms what you have said about Fritz's "fiefdom."

D: That's what it was. Curry was chief, but powerless to deal with a homicide. And as chief, it was in his city that the President was killed. After all, the Dallas mayor, Cabell, became known afterwards, because of who his brother was, but he didn't take the heat that Curry did. And the other man--bet you most assassination readers can't even name him--

W: Are you referring to City Manager Elgin Crull? [I pronounced it El-gin, like the mixed drink, and it's Elgin, hard g.]

D: Yes. An unknown, and he stayed that way. But Curry got it right between the eyes--he was police chief in the city where the President had been killed. Fritz wasn't, Decker wasn't. It was all on Jess. He made a careless--but knowing him, *honest*--remark about the FBI during an early press conference, and Gordon Shanklin [SAC of the Dallas office] had to beg Curry to get on t.v. again and say nice things about good old J. Edgar, or Shanklin's *** would have wound up in Stagnant Stump, Wyoming, forever. And you know that no Dallas officers were invited to FBI training sessions, and we got precious little FBI cooperation, until Curry left.

W: So, you are saying...

D: Let me finish. I was there when Curry put together that booklet that costs what, a hundred bucks today? I have a proof copy of it [stops, and displays it...impressive, to say the very least]. That was NOT a labor of love for Jesse Curry. He was basically saying, "Here's the case as you saw it, and as I saw it, and I was just as far outside as you were." And he was. But deep down,

when there were no microphones present, and when Mark Lane was not around, and when he was relaxed in the company of officers that he knew he could speak openly to and with, he made it abundantly clear that he did not believe that it was Oswald alone--and he said more than once that if he had had to sit in front of a grand jury and be asked, "Do you have sufficient evidence to indict Lee Oswald?" he would have answered, knowing it would be his last day on the job, "enough to indict, yes. Convict,--well, don't ask."

W: I wish he had lived to read *People v. Lee Harvey Oswald*.

D: I have nothing but good memories of that man, and I will never say a word against him, but yes, he would have enjoyed it--except for the part where you tore into him. You were right, as an observer from a distance, but Jess was just in, over his head, from the time JFK's trip was announced.

W: Fair enough. Let's get back to November 22. Did you do any actual "investigating" while you were there--you said you passed some "earwitnesses" to the command post.

D: Oh, yes! And this troubles me very deeply to this day. I had no assignment, in any specific way, and if any of my immediate superiors in CID were on scene, they were not taking the time to tell me what to do. So, as things began to settle down, and as I was calming down from the realization that the shooting had hit the limo in the middle of the street and traffic was allowed to go right over that part of the crime scene almost immediately--

W: Not exactly Sherlock Holmes at work.

D: No. But that would be a good way to describe what follows. When people tell me about shots from "over there,"

and "over there" clearly is not "up there" in the window, I got out the "standard issue" spiral ring notebook, and I went through those railroad yards and wrote down the plate number of every vehicle that was west [the underpass side] of the Depository. And I turned that notebook in, for the leads to be run, and it just.... disappeared.

W: Just like that?

D: Just like that. Gone. Hell, if you handed it back to me, right now, today, I could still go into computers and find a great deal of data about that day. And--oh, let me add. In one of the books, I can't remember which [ed. I couldn't either], there's a photo of two other officers, doing the same basic thing. When I saw that, or maybe I remember it from back then, but I asked them about uh, their experiences, and it was the same with them. Notes taken. Notes submitted. Notes gone.

W: Admittedly, it's a guess, but if you had to make a guess....

D: FBI. Had to be. See, the occasionally overlooked "piece" in the puzzle, if you will, is the killing of J.D. [Tippit]. With all the buzz going around about conspiracy--which is partly a natural phenomenon, but also based in the overzealous federal effort to contain events, if there was a hint of conspiracy, then it could have been involved in J.D.'s killing [gets emotional....], and we would have worked around the clock to get.. let's call them, "all the others."

W: So you are saying that you have reason to suspect that JFK was the victim of a conspiracy, and therefore it would follow, logically, that an extension of that conspiracy was the shooting of Tippit.

D: Yes. Exactly. It seems more persuasive--although not totally convincing--that Oswald was at least at

the Tippit scene. Did he kill him? Did he kill him because he was the lone assassin, or because he had realized he'd been set up and he just wasn't ready to be taken into police custody...yet? Too many people tend to oversimplify at times. We did care about J.D., as a fellow officer, and we would have left no stone unturned.

W: There are stories that J.D. Tippit was not the most popular officer.

D: It wasn't a matter of popularity. First of all, cops are a fraternity, regardless. Second, when a shift ended, if ten guys walked out the door together, nine turned right and went looking for a good drink and [euphemism for female companionship]. But J.D. turned left, and was restoring an older vehicle for his wife. I know about the rumors, and I can't tell you anything, except sure, they are rumors.

W: Since you mentioned the "cops as fraternity" notion, what is the truth as you know it with respect to the story about cops in 1963 being portrayed as almost an exclusive group of right-wing fanatics, KKK, Minutemen, and Birchers?

D: [Pained expression--glad he was not carrying a service revolver at that moment...]. It's essentially a half truth. See, any police department is at best a reflection of the overall population--the demographic section--from which they are chosen. Texas, in 1963, or maybe I should say Dallas, but it was right wing. If there was a parade on the Fourth of July, the one guy from the ACLU would have had to carry the banner himself. Conservative thinking--old values that go back a long ways--were absolutely predominant, and the police were chosen from that pool of people. I can assure you that they were NOT all KKK, or the other groups you mentioned. However, that doesn't mean that, so to speak, they

didn't often have to think that way. [We were driving in Dallas at this moment]. See that car? [Male African American driver, white female passenger.] In 1963, cops would stop that car, because if they didn't, some citizen would throw a brick at it.

W: No...

D: Oh yes... it was riot protection, nothing more, nothing less. We'd rather do that than investigate a homicide, which, in a case like that, was a real possibility--Medgar Evers? JFK? Names ring any bells? [We took a pause].

Following a well-chosen route for an auto tour, including getting "in behind" 1026 N. Beckley, the rooming house where Lee Oswald spent his final night of freedom, it was amazing to see how truly sprawling that boarding house is. For those who aren't aware, it has 22 bedrooms--granted, small, but we even counted six cable hookups out back.

Then we ran several possible "Oswald routes" to the Tippit encounter. I went back to my earlier train of thought about the politics of police in the 1960s.

W: There's no easy way to say this, but were the officers on duty, at the time of the motorcade, serious about presidential protection, or were they "just doing their job" so to speak?

D: Well, I was doing mine, as ordered, until I heard the signal 19--involving the President.

W: Let me clarify. A researcher named Larry Sneed interviewed, I believe, 49 people related to the JFK assassination. Witnesses as well as a number of cops. It's a great book--big, too, and called "No More Silence." I was very impressed by much of what I read in there, until the end, where Bill Alexander is interviewed. His story was that people

had a job, perhaps a duty, to protect the president. But as far as the individual person, JFK, getting blown away in Dallas, he had no concerns. Can you share a sense of what that kind of thinking was about?

D: It would be very difficult. There were many emotions at work that day, as we know from what happened that day. In many cases, cops are cops, and they'll do what their job requires. If that means walking in front of a prisoner--which someone should have done with Oswald--they'll do it, because it is their job. But were people begging for the JFK protective assignment? By and large, no.

W: Let me interrupt--it has always struck me as odd that protection, except reserves, was not increased that day. People who had the day off, or called in sick, or were on leave--that was fine. Many of the names you read about in the literature only came on duty after they heard of the shooting.

D: Again, I *was* on duty, so I can't speak for the off duty officers. But you have to realize. If the whole force had been on the streets, it would have meant overtime pay, and that was frowned on in a big way. So I guess only the regular shift was on duty. See, back then, cops were not paid much, and money was tight. The higher-ups would use any excuse to create a forfeiture of pay situation. There were rules, again, this is back then--but there were rules saying that you had to wear long sleeve shirts in all weather, and you had to have your police cap on at all times. If you were written up for an infraction, you immediately forfeited three days pay. Now that nonsense happened often, so if 100 officers were written up for that, the fine paid the year's salary for a new cop. Money was tight, and the Secret Service was seen as the protection. We were the

escort, [pause, a little lost, somewhere else] and as I think back on it, it seems that the who and the how and the what of it were just so slick that no matter how many Secret Service or cops there had been, JFK was a target in a big way, and was meant to fall, in Dealey Plaza or, well, somewhere else along the route.

W: Are you suggesting there was another shooting team somewhere?

D: From conclusions, not data. Once the decision to kill a president is taken, there can be no failure. So if Dealey Plaza had not seemed a likely success, yes, I think there could have been others, in waiting.

W: One final thought. You mentioned the Secret Service. Did you ever hear any of the rumors--stories--about Secret Service men on the grassy knoll shortly after the shooting?

D: Let me tell you what I know. There were a couple instances--I knew the officers in question, who were told by individuals that they were Secret Service, and they flipped open one of those leather folders, with the photo and the fancy engraving. So, yes, the words "Secret Service" were said. That was a fact that went through the department at the time. But the credentials themselves were not Secret Service. They were Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. One officer--can't and won't say his name, would later be interviewed by the Secret Service, and their "real" credentials were unlike what he had seen. So he checked into it and realized, that for an instant, he had seen Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms credentials, not Secret Service.

W: That sounds pretty conspiratorial to me.

D: [Drawing on a cigarette] Remember, you said that. I didn't.

DEEP QUOTES

"Conspiracies no sooner should be form'd
Than Executed"

--Addison, *Cato*

"Plots, true or false, are necessary things,
To raise up commonwealths, and ruin
kings."

--Dryden, *Absalom to Achitophel*

"Take no car Who cafes, who frets, or
where conspirers are."

--Shakespeare, *MacBeth*

"Open eye conspiracy His time doth
take."

--Shakespeare, *Tempest*

Truth or Dare: The Lives and Lies of Richard Case Nagell

--by Dave Reitzes

It was September 20, 1963, and Richard Case Nagell had had enough.

A decorated war hero in Korea, Nagell had resigned from the US Army in 1959 with a 64 percent disability retirement, which was at least 36 percent short of what he thought he deserved for his experience, which had earned him severe disfigurement and permanent brain damage.(1) According to one Army psychiatrist, Nagell's "judgment and perception of reality was seriously disturbed so that he could not accurately distinguish right from wrong,"(2) the result not only of battle, but of a 1954 plane crash in which Nagell had been the only survivor. (3)